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New contra leaders said to present only façade of unity

Critics say little has changed and CIA will still call the shots

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"The new contra directorate leaves most of the problems facing the movement untouched," says a senior United States government official who has worked closely with most contra factions. "Its façade of unity is basically a time bomb which will explode one day, but in the meantime it's convenient for both the Democrats and the administration."

The official's opinion is shared by ranking Republican and Democratic Senate staff aides, pro-contra US intellectuals, and some contra leaders.

The new directorate has been expanded from three to seven members, with a view to uniting the Nicaraguan exile movement. Added to Adolfo Calero and Alfonso Robelo are: Aristides Sanchez (from Mr. Calero's movement, the FDN), Pedro Joaquín Chamorro (former editor of the La Prensa newspaper and son of a Nicaraguan national hero), Azucena Ferrey of the Social Christians, and Alfredo César (head of Southern Opposition Bloc [BOS], a Costa Rico-based coalition of liberal contras. The seventh member, a Nicaraguan Indian representative, will be chosen this summer.

According to the US official, "The Democrats are preparing a deal with the Sandinistas as part of their next electoral platform." That deal, he believes, will fundamentally consist of eliminating Soviet and Cuban presence in Nicaragua, insisting on the reduction of Nicaraguan armament, but basically letting the Sandinista regime do what it wants internally with some cosmetic touches of added democracy.

Key Democratic Senate aides add that, if the Sandinistas broke such a deal, a Democratic administration would be prepared to invade.

According to the official and to several top Democratic Senate aides, however, the Democrats believe that it would be unwise to cut off aid to the contras prematurely. The disintegrate of the contras before the election would give Republicans a powerful campaign issue - the accusation that the Democrat-controlled Congress "lost Nicaragua."

The Senate most likely will, according to one top Senate Democratic aide, vote for at least \$100 million in contra assistance next October. Although the House might reject this, he said, an assistance package will almost certainly be put together in committee.

This kind of aid, in the view of the senior US official, will not let the contras mount a serious challenge to the Sandinistas but will spare the Democrats from the charge of having sold out democracy in Nicaragua.

He says that, in the November 1988 elections, at which time the contras will not have come significantly closer to their goal of overthrowing the Sandinistas, the

Democrats will be able to state that Reagan's policy is a failure.

However, he said, after the embarrassing resignation of Arturo Cruz from the contra leadership, the Democrats could not vote for more assistance without at least the fig leaf of a new directorate.

The appearance of unity created by the new directorate will permit the administration to continue with the same policy, even if it knows the policy does not work, the official says. This enables the administration to avoid making difficult political decisions that would alienate the President, split the bureaucracy, and antagonize many of the government's right-wing supporters.

But some observers envision another hypothetical scenario for the administration. Imagine, they say, that President Reagan is significantly weakened by testimony given by Lt. Col. Oliver North and Rear Adm. John Poindexter during the Iran-contra hearings and *de facto* government leadership passes to White House chief of staff Howard Baker Jr. and national-security adviser Frank Carlucci.

In such an event, the observers suggest, the two aides might try to steal the Democrats' thunder by imposing a similar kind of deal with Nicaragua on the President and his right-wing supporters.

Ernesto Palacio, the official spokesman for UNO (the contras' umbrella organization), is enthusiastic about the naming of the new directorate and the new assembly (enlarged from 28 to 54 members). He called it, "an explosion of democracy" and said that "a lot of political compromises went into the naming of the directorate and assembly."

But the contra reorganization is viewed with some cynicism among many who are usually sympathetic to the anti-Sandinista cause. One contra official who is not related to the Cruz family says, "The directorate may have been enlarged, but the main problems remain. The army is still controlled by the FDN, and by pro-Somoza and conservative forces. As for the new assembly, once it has elected the new directorate, it has no real function."

One top Republican Senate staff aide, long sympathetic to the contra cause, concurs. "The new directorate is quite irrelevant. It will not be able to inspire any of the elements necessary to overthrow the Sandinistas, that is, the formation of a real anti-Sandinista political organization in Nicaragua. Nor will they excite the

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involvement of a significant proportion of the Nicaraguan exile community.

"After six wasted years of effort," he continues, "I don't think any of the contra leaders are willing to make the two or three years of real effort it would take to organize the internal resistance in Nicaragua. Instead, the leaders are all looking for a *deus ex machina* solution, a US invasion."

A senior Democratic Senate aide concurs, saying, "The FDN leaders need not pay any attention to the directorate, since they will continue getting their money and orders from the CIA."

While contra spokesmen say that the new directorate represents a significant step toward unity, many other analysts doubt this.

The senior US official who has worked with the contras for many years says, "Unity will be the merest façade, kept together - at least until the US elections - by the ringmaster CIA."

"The main change is that the right will be divided," the official adds. "Calero will no longer be the omnipotent chief, he will be fighting for power with his fellow FDN leader, Aristides Sanchez. While Calero sat in Miami playing politics, Mr. Sanchez suffered with the troops on the ground. He is much more efficient than Calero and will now probably be tired of playing the estate steward to the absentee landlord. Furthermore, he's winning increasing support from the CIA."

On the left, the fight will be between Mr. Robelo and BOS leader Alfredo César, according to the US official.

"Both of them are opportunists," he said, "but César is much brighter and more astute than Robelo and will probably outmaneuver him."

"Then in the center is Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, a man without great intelligence or ability, who, however, expects to inherit his father's mantle and be carried like a crown prince into Managua by the Americans."

The most interesting figure is César, according to the official. "César," he said, "has finally decided to join up with the FDN because Arturo Cruz's departure can enable him to play the role of the liberal and man of goodwill."

"He hopes to become the favorite child of the Democrats after 1988. He also joined because media stories about the involvement of Octaviano, his brother and close associate, in the drug trade has made him more needy of respectability."

Observers say the administration will try to present César to Congress as the liberal successor to Cruz. He is, however, a controversial figure. Both Republican and Democratic Senate aides describe him as a man who is more effective than Cruz, but who has less integrity.

One liberal contra official reacted to these statements of congressional staff members by saying, "Alfredo César may be a man without political or moral principles, or any real sensitivity to the Nicaraguan poor. He may be of dubious financial probity. But, unfortunately, we have seen that an honest man like Arturo Cruz cannot be the leader in a fight against the Sandinistas. Perhaps every government gets the opposition it deserves."